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ABSTRACT

One of a series of documents produced by a nationwide network of early childhood education specialists, teachers, parents, and Head Start staff, the booklet presents ideas and resources for using puppets in Head Start and elementary school activities. Puppets are seen as a way to enhance home-school communication, train teachers, and teach and entertain children. Directions for using puppets, constructing a stage, rehearsing, using scripts, "ad libbing," and making puppets are given. The document concludes with a list of puppet resources and a basic hand puppet pattern. (LH)

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THE PUPPET FACTOR

Ideas and Resources for Using Puppets in Head Start and Elementary

PS 013 693

Produced by:
The Basic Educational Skills Project
Ignacio, Colorado
1982

THE BEST OF BES
MADE BY TEACHERS
COMPILED BY SEDL, AUSTIN, TX.
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THE PUPPET FACTOR

A group of Head Start parents sat enrapt as a large purple frog chatted amicably from a puppet stage. Fern the Frog played the part of a Head Start mother attending Parent Orientation Night to see what her little Tad was facing in the program.

Fern asked questions every parent would like to ask, and a Head Start teacher outside the stage answered them effectively. The teacher explained briefly how the program worked, and Head Start's desire to have parents come to class and help in various ways. Fern was surprised that she could be a part of her child's education and promptly volunteered to become involved.

There's more, but suffice it to say, the message was carried to parents in a fun and effective way. Parents' comments afterwards proved the usefulness of puppets as a means of communication.

"I never realized I could be involved in my child's class."
"I'm really excited about getting involved."
"Thank you for such a fun meeting."

The local Head Start has enjoyed increased participation of parents at meetings and as classroom volunteers.

At the elementary school, puppets helped at inservice training by illustrating the problem of student absences. Teacher discussion followed, and some solutions came to light. Teachers remarked later that the puppet skit touched on a problem of common interest and set them thinking. It's interesting to note that teachers still talk about that particular inservice. They not only enjoyed it, but remembered its emphasis.

These are only two ways puppets can help you. Puppets can enhance home-school communication, train teachers, and teach and delight the children themselves. And <u>you</u> can do it!

Here's some practical help to develop an effective puppet program.

WHY PUPPETS?

Puppets work. It's as simple as that. Puppets can communicate effectively with both children and adults. Puppetry is an enjoyable way to learn. It holds interest and adds variety to already established teaching methods. Puppetry stimulates the creativity and uses the talents and imagination. Puppets can say things that teachers can't - can correct problem areas, can speak on touchy issues without remonstration. Lectures are often "tuned out," but people listen when puppets talk. Puppets are popular at present, and this very popularity may be used to good purpose.

Educationally, puppets can teach: aid children to develop problem solving skills, learn alternative solution thinking, consequential thinking, become aware of emotional consequences to actions, develop causual thinking and enhance interpersonal relationships.

Puppets can share cultural heritage, traditions, and teach native languages.

There are probably very few areas that puppets cannot deal with, providing the puppeteers are sensitive and well prepared.

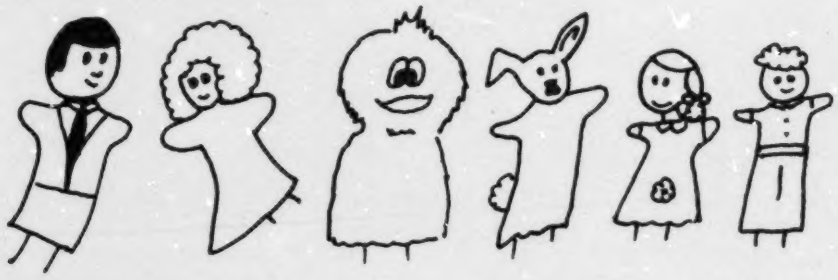
THE PUPPETS

First of all, you will need to buy or make a few basic puppets. Two patterns are included in this booklet from which many characters can be created. Inexpensive puppets are available in department stores and are good ones with which to start. Well-known characters, such as Muppets and Smurfs, are instantly recognized and audience interest and response are assured. Animal puppets are always favorites and should be included in a basic set.

What comprises a "basic set" of puppets? A man, woman, boy or girl - a family; one or two animals; and a "creature" type which is neither animal nor person are suggested.

Develop some enduring characters - characters the audience will want to meet again and again. Fern the Frog, mentioned in the introduction to this booklet, is a regular character created by the Living Puppet House. Her puppeteer has developed her character and personality over a period of years. As such, Fern may be placed in numerous situations and react as "herself."

Books are suggested in the RESOURCE section which will help you with puppet characterization.

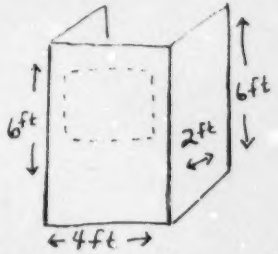


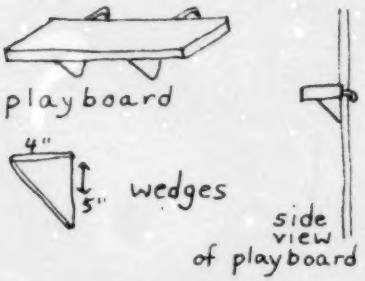
THE STAGE

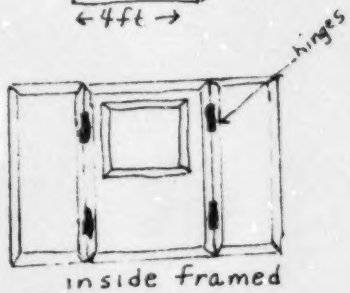
You can put a curtain in a doorway, or hide behind a piano to do puppets, but as your skill and interest grow, you will want a stage. Here are directions for a simple, easily stored, inexpensive stage.

Materials needed:

2 pieces 4' X 8' paneling
4 2½" hinges
6 6' 1"x2" strips
3 8' 1"x2" strips
glue, nails, hammer, saw







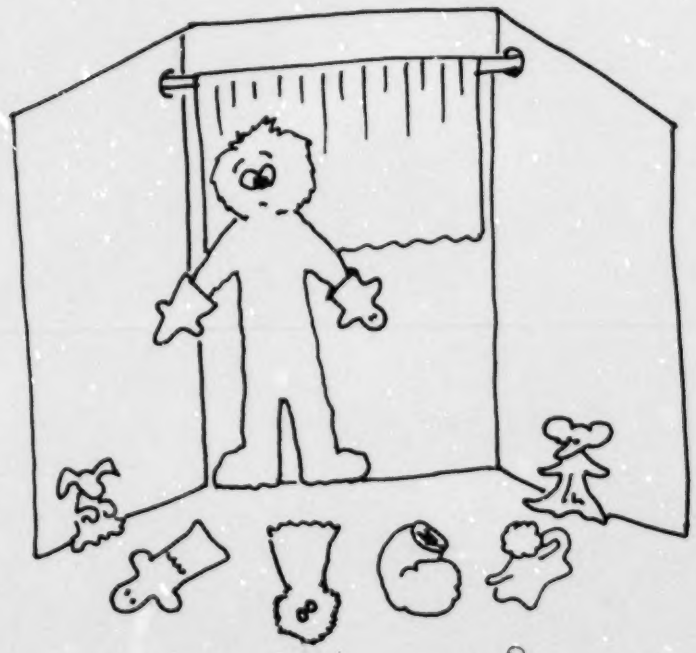
Cut paneling into 3 pieces: front piece 4 feet wide, 2 side pieces 2 feet wide (height may be 6 feet or 6'4"). Cut a "window" from the front piece. Make the bottom of the opening waist high so adult puppeteers can stand up and work. Window opening may be any size desired. Frame each section of the stage and window opening with 1"x2" strips to reinforce it. Hinge the two sides to the front so the stage folds flat for storage. A playboard is a shelf on which puppets may put props. A playboard for this stage may be made from a piece of pine 3 feet long, 4 inches wide, and 1 inch thick. Two wedges are nailed to the bottom of the shelf so it rests against the stage front. Two metal L-shaped hooks are screwed into the back of the shelf to allow it to hook over the bottom edge of the stage opening.

REHEARSAL

Nothing is worse than a sloppy, poorly-rehearsed show. Determine from the start to prepare as well as possible.

After the puppets and script have been selected, sit down with the puppeteers and read through the script. This helps "set" the characters, and lets everyone involved become comfortable with the material. Next, read through the script with puppets on hands and see what puppet action is needed to carry the story along. Now, rehearse in the stage. Use one person outside the stage to tell puppeteers if puppets are maintaining proper stage height, looking "alive", moving the mouth properly, speaking in a clear voice. Be prepared to make corrections to make your show a good one.

Patience, tired arms from holding up puppets, and sweating in close quarters are part of being a puppeteer. Be ready to do it all!



WHEN TO USE PUPPETS

Puppets are amazingly versatile. Once you develop some puppeteers, you will see many opportunities in which to use puppets. In classroom settings, a set of hand puppets may be made up that have no facial features. Children may be encouraged to use these "faceless" puppets for role play, to encourage oral language experiences, to exhibit feelings, and much more.

At teacher inservice, puppets may present a problem and offer solutions, or leave the question open-ended for discussion. For parent meetings, puppets may be used to convey information, explain policy or concepts, and encourage parents.

Seasonal topics should be utilized, and shows may be presented just for the pleasure and entertainment of the children.

Be on the lookout for other ways to use puppets.

SCRIPTS AND IDEAS

What do you want to accomplish with puppetry: teach a lesson, communicate a message, stimulate language development, or just have fun? Once you decide the objective, either write or find a script in a book that meets the need.

There are many script books available. Local libraries carry some and you can buy others of your choice. Write to The Puppetry Store for a catalog (address in RESOURCE section). Reading good scripts will help the new puppeteer learn what elements make a good script. Watch good puppetry whenever the opportunity presents itself. See Muppet Shows and movies, attend live performances in your area.

You'll find many scripts to use or adapt, but there are always situations that are specific and call for an original script. Don't panic at the thought of writing one.

Here are some tips for writing the script you need. Three basic ingredients for scripts are: FACT, ACTION, HUMOR.

FACT

This is the message, the truth, the fact, that you want to get across to the audience. Settle on one fact and gear everything else in the show to explain, or reveal it.

ACTION

Puppetry is a medium that is visual and moving. Action keeps the audience watching. Look at the story FACT and see how you can activate it. What situation, action will make it come alive? Actions should be natural, simple, yet large and expressive.

HUMOR

This is the hook that keeps the audience listening. It should be natural, arise from the situation, not corny, not mocking or hurtful to others. (And remember: when the audience laughs at a funny line, pause till they're done, so they don't miss the next line.)

Remember, too, that a good story still has a BEGINNING, a MIDDLE, and an END. Make your point with action and humor and bring the show to a satisfactory close.

The Ad-Lib Script

Some people are comfortable working without a written script. If your group is inclined this way, by all means use an "ad-lib" script. It works this way: a situation is set up, characters interact without written lines. There is a catch to this: you still have to rehearse.

Describe the situation, problem, concept you will deal with. Select puppet characters who will best convey the point. Zero in on key points you wish to make in the presentation. Now, get in the stage and let the characters work through the problem. In the workthrough, you may come up with some especially good lines. Write them down and use them. Funny actions and laugh lines will emerge. Keep and use them, too. Rehearse the material until all feel comfortable with it, and until it is conveying the point desired.

An ad-lib script is a lot of fun to do, but it should never be used as an excuse not to rehearse.

MAKING YOUR OWN PUPPETS

These two basic patterns make it possible to create a complete repertoire of puppet characters at low costs. Fake fur pieces make effective mouth puppets, but by using skin-colored velour, realistic "people" puppets may also be made. The mouth puppet pattern may be enlarged to make any size puppet desired.

Do not underestimate the capability of hand puppets. They can be most effective in using props and acting out stories. Add styrofoam heads to this hand puppet body and create even more defined characters.

see pattern page in center of book

RESOURCES

Where to find what you need to do puppetry:

PUPPETS AND BOOKS

Using puppets from a department store has been suggested. Most store puppets are very short, meaning that the puppeteer's arm will show readily when used in a stage. It is a good idea to plan to add a length of material to the puppet's body, or use colored gloves under the puppet to cover your arm.

Hand made puppets are available from a number of sources, but expect to pay for them. Literally any kind of puppet character can be created by professional puppetmakers. Here are a few sources from which to order special and ready-made puppets of better quality and size than stores offer:

Fisk Family of Puppets, 1403 Catalpa Avenue, Mount Prospect, IL 60056 (special orders)

Joyous Puppets, 64 Lewis Avenue, Walpole, MA 02081 (special orders)

Joy Unlimited Puppets, 9268B 3 Chopt Road, Richmond, VA 23229 (special orders)

Maher Ventriloquist Studios, Box 420, Littleton, CO 80160 (catalog)

Puppetlife, 10 Wendell Avenue, Troy, NY 12180 (special orders)

Puppet Maker, 2113 Red Oak, Irving, TX 75060

Puppets Puppets, Box 2128, Dallas, TX 75221 (catalog)

Puppets from One-Way Street, 7160 S. Eudora Court, Littleton, CO 80122 (catalog)

Creative Production Company, P.O. Box 83, Blythewood, SC 29016

The Puppetry Store, 14316 Sturtevant Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904 (write for catalog)

Some books available from The Puppetry Store include:

"Creative Puppets in the Classroom" by Mary Freericks and Joyce Segal. $5.95
"Eight Plays for Hand Puppets" by A.R. Philpott
"Folk Tales for Puppets" by Mahlmann and Jones. $9.95.
"Making Puppets Come Alive" by Engler and Fijan. $9.95.
"Holiday Plays for Puppets or People" by Boylan. $4.00

Other puppet services and materials are available from:

Educational Puppetry
The Puppet Masters
P.O. Box 11162
Palo Alto, CA
Multimedia kits/books/ crafts/supplies/scripts/ workshops

Puppets Puppets
Box 2128
Dallas, TX 75221
Ask for catalog

Fool on the Hill Marionettes
132 State Street
Seneca Falls, NY 13148
Ask for flyer

Puppet Hardware
739 Ecton Road
Akron, OH 44303
Stages

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PUPPET PATTERNS

Backes Patterns, 7500 Babcock Trail, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55075
(14 animal patterns, $4.95)

Dragon Patterns, Dept. M, 649 Main Street, Deadwood, SD 57732
(patterns and stuff)

Fran's Puppets, 10950 Nina Street, Seminole, FL 33540
(send 50¢ for catalog)

Betty Polis, Boulder Creek, CA 95006
(Puppet in Wheel Chair)

Puppetlife, 10 Wendell Avenue, Troy, NY
(human character and dog, $1.75 each)

Puppet Pals, 100 Belhaven Drive, Los Gatos, CA 95030
(human characters and monsters)

The Joy Unlimited Puppets, 9286B 3 Chopt Road, Richmond, VA 23229
(7 patterns for $3)

PUPPETRY ORGANIZATIONS

There are two principal organizations for puppeteers in the United States. Both offer a variety of experience and a publication which carries information and how-to.

PUPPETEERS OF AMERICA
#5 Cricklewood Path
Pasadena, CA 91107

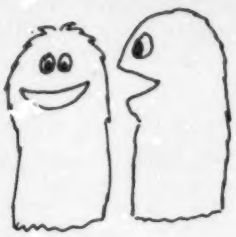
For both amateur and professional. Membership $25.00 per year includes subscription to "The Puppetry Journal".

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN PUPPETEERS (FCP)
7659 Rockfalls Drive
Richmond, VA 23225

This is a non-demoninational group which produces an excellent quarterly newsletter with patterns and ideas. $5.00 per year.

NOTES

Basic Hand puppet pattern



BASIC MOUTH PUPPET

cut 2 pieces

Dart

Sew A+B together B first on each body piece.

mouth opening

Do not sew closed

Open staples and lift out pattern page

DIRECTIONS

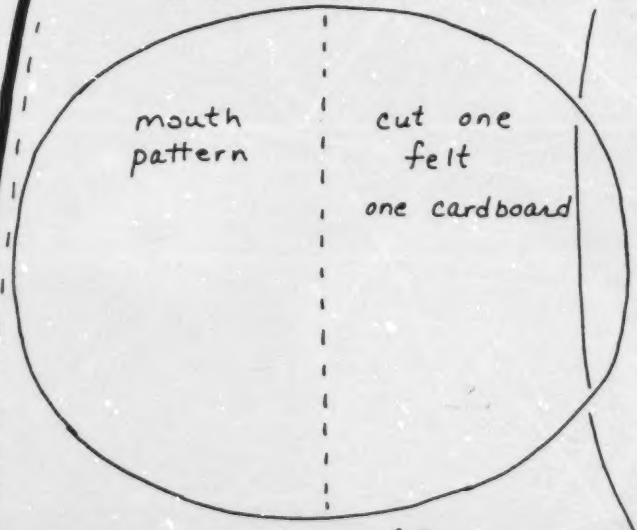
Materials needed:

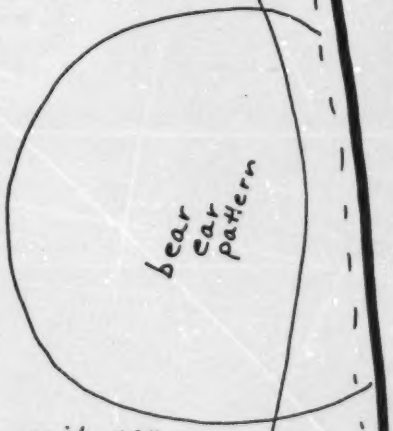
Fake fur (long or short pile) or velour - 1 piece 12" X 12" or 16" X 16"
Thread/scissors/straight pins/needle/craft glue
Eyes - may be store bought, moveable eyes; small styrofoam balls cut in half and painted; eyes from felt; or buttons
Felt - for mouth, eyes, ears
A piece of lightweight cardboard (the back of a tablet or shirt-cardboard will do) for mouth stiffening (or beak for bird)

Save felt and fur scraps for next time!

Procedure for making your puppet:

1. Sew darts first.
2. Pin body completely (except mouth) matching corners.
3. Hand sew body with blanket stitch.
4. Cut out felt mouth.
5. Pin mouth into opening. Sew inside-out.
6. Cut circle from cardboard, using mouth pattern. Cut cardboard in half. Leave ½ inch space between halves and fix with masking tape. This gives the mouth better "action".
7. Put glue on cardboard and shove carefully into mouth area. Work quickly. Hold in place till glue sticks.
8. Add ears, eyes, arms, and any other touches desired.





rabbit ear pattern